

Marketing Herbs

Agriculture and Natural Resources Fact Sheet #519

Consumer interest in herbs is on the rise. Opportunities for growers to find a niche in the fast growing herb industry exist in culinary, medicinal, landscaping, cosmetic, and decorative herb markets. In fact, medicinal herbs contribute to the strongest growth sectors in even main stream American drug stores (Sturdivant and Blakely, 1999). Media coverage of herbs and herbal products is also increasing. According to Paula Oliver editor of *The Business of Herbs*, "Just about any general-interest consumer magazine you can name has had a recent article on herb gardening, healthy cooking with herbs, herbal medicine, aromatherapy, natural fragrances, dried flowers...you name it (1994)." The United States Department of Agriculture even suggests "there is a strong need for the production of high-quality, reliably identified seed sources (1995)."

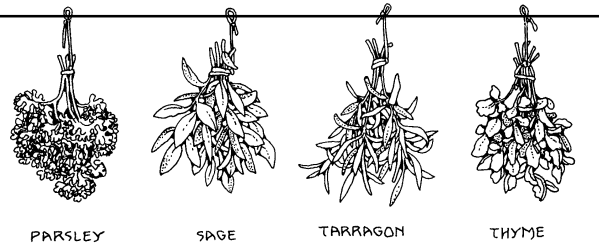
A decade ago information on the marketing and growing of herbs was hard to come by. Today many resources are available to help growers get on the right track in the herb business. If growing herbs for any sector of the industry interests you, here are a few ideas and resources to help you.

Make Plans, Do Research, and Stay Informed

Define your goals. Before you do any market research, figure out what you really want to do and at what scale. Inventory your strengths and weaknesses. Consider the physical location of your venture as well as the physical resources you might need. Plan for expansion and be flexible. Your objectives may change over time as you grow and learn.

As with any business venture, market research is essential. Market research can be as simple as observing what is in stores or what your local community needs are. Selling samples on a small scale can give you an idea of consumer interest in your product before you expand to larger scale operations. Surveys and demographic studies, though a bit more complex and costly, can provide invaluable information about your potential market. Talk to people! Other growers are increasingly willing to share information, and retailers and wholesalers can also provide insights about market trends and needs.

Keep in touch with customers and consumers. Are their needs changing? If your customers become more sophisticated and knowledgeable about your product than you are you can lose



their confidence and their business. To stay informed read appropriate journals, newsletters, or other publications, attend workshops and conferences, and talk to other growers.

Many herbal ventures involve creating valued-added products. Don't overlook the importance of complying with health regulations. Not only will your operation be legal but your customers will have greater confidence in you and your products. Contact your local health department for information.

Be Realistic and Patient

After you have carefully considered various enterprise and marketing options and their associated costs, choose the scale of operation that fits your situation the best. Though opportunities for selling herbs are out there and may be increasing, it takes an initial investment and time before your efforts pay off.

A Few Herb Growing and Marketing Possibilities

Chinese herbs
Contract growing (for restaurants or herbalists)
Culinary herbs (fresh & dried)
Decorative herbs
Dried herbs
Herb education (give seminars, conduct herb walks, write herb newsletters)
Herb farms
Herbal products (soaps, cosmetics, oils, vinegars)
Medicinal herbs
Organic herbs
Selling plants (for landscaping & gardening)
Seeds
Wildcrafting

Marketing

Reppert, Bertha. 1994. *Growing Your Herb Business*. Storey Books, PO Box 445, Pownal, VT 05261, (800) 441-5700; web: <www.storey.com>.

Shores, Sandie. 1999. *Selling Fresh-Cut Herbs*. Available for \$27.95 from Storey Books, PO Box 445, Pownal, VT 05261, (800) 441-5700; web: <www.storey.com>.

Sturdivant, Lee. 1994. *Herbs For Sale: Growing and Marketing Herbs, Herbal Products and Herbal Know-How*. Available from San Juan Naturals for \$16.50. (800)770-9070; email: naturals@bootstraps.com; web: <www.bootstraps.com>.

Pricing

Fresh Herbs

National Wholesale Herb Market News Report available from Fruit and Vegetable Market News, Attn: Jacqueline Davis, Market Reporter for Herbs, USDA-AMS, 230 South Dearborn St., Rm 512, Chicago IL 60804; (312) 353-0111; web: <www.ams.usda.gov/fv/mktnews.html>.

Processed Herbs

Chemical Marketing Reporter, Schnell Publishing Co., 100 Church St., New York, NY 10007.

Production

Journal of Herbs, Spices & Medicinal Plants, The Hawthorne Press, Inc. 10 Alice St., Binghamton, NY 13904-1580.

Proceedings of the National Herb Growing and Marketing Conferences, Extension Office, Center for New Crops, 1165 Horticulture Bldg., Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907; web: <www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/>.

Trade Associations

American Botanical Council, PO Box 201660, Austin, TX 78720; (512) 926-4900; web: <www.herbalgram.org>.

American Herb Association PO Box 1673, Nevada City, CA 95959; (916) 265-9552.

American Herbal Products Association. PO Box 2410 Austin, TX 78768 (512) 320-8555; web: <www.ahpa.org>.

American Herbalists Guild P.O. Box 70, Roosevelt, UT 84066 Phone: (435) 722-8434; Fax: (435) 722-8452 email: ahgoffice@earthlink.net; web: <www.healthy.net/herbalists>.

Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, MPO 268, Oberlin, OH 44074; (440) 774-2887; e-mail: judy@ascfg.org; web: <www.ascfg.org>.

Great Northern Botanicals Association, PO Box 362, Helena, MT 59624.

The Herb Growing and Marketing Network. PO Box 245, Silver Spring, PA 17575 (717) 393-3295; web: <www.herbnet.com>. Publishes *The Herbal Connection*, a bimonthly trade journal and *The Herbal Green*

Pages, an annual resource guide.

The Herb Society of America 9019 Kirtland Chardon Rd, Kirtland, Ohio 44094; (440) 256-0514; web: <www.herbsociety.org>.

The International Herb Association, 1202 Allanson Rd., Mundelein, IL, 60060 (708) 949-4372.

Other Sources

The Business of Herbs at GardenNet <gardenet.com/BOH/>.

The Herb Farm 32804 Issaquah-Fall City Rd, Fall City, WA 98024, (SE 46th St turns into Issaquah-Fall City Rd); (425) 222-7103. Offers herb classes and sells plants.

Natural Land's Herbal News <www.naturalland.com/hrbv/hrbnews>.

University of California Small Farm Center. 1 Shields Ave, University of California, Davis, CA 95616-8699; (530) 752-8136; E-mail: sfcenter@ucdavis.edu; web: <www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/pubs>.

UW Medicinal Herb Garden c/o Botany Department, University of Washington, Box 355325, Seattle, WA, 98195-5325; (206) 543-1126; web: <www.nlm.nih.gov/pnr/uwmhg/>.

Sources Cited

Oliver, Paula C. 1994. *Herb Retailing in the 1990s*. The Business of Herbs. Northwind Farm Publications. Shelvin, MN.

Sturdivant, Lee, and T. Blakely. 1999. *Medicinal Herbs in the Garden, Field, and Marketplace*. San Juan Naturals. Friday Harbor, WA.

USDA. 1995. *Herbs: A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative*. Cooperative State Research Service, Office for Small-Scale Agriculture. Washington, DC.

**Alternate formats available upon request.
206-205-3100 (TTY 711)**

No endorsement is intended of any businesses listed in this fact sheet, nor is criticism of unnamed businesses implied.

Written by [Sylvia Kantor](#), WSU Cooperative Extension King County, 1999.

Cooperating agencies: Washington State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and King County. Cooperative Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of non-compliance may be reported through your local Cooperative Extension office.